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ABSTRACT

Intended for counselors, the document offers guidelines for identifying nonattendance in primary grade students. Sections outline procedures for analyzing attendance patterns, signs of nonattendance for teachers to look for, actions to take when nonattendance is identified, types of nonattendance (such as chronic illnesses, overprotective parent, and school phobia) and possible solutions, and actions to take on occurrence of daily absenteeism and period skipping. Also provided is a table listing categories of nonattendance with common characteristics and possible steps toward resolution for each category. A school attendance form and attendance calendar form conclude the document. (SBH)

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ADJUSTMENT SERVICES

In order that all students may derive optimum benefits from experiences at school, the Adjustment Services Department offers the following:

- School and Home Visiting Services
- Consultation Service
- Co-ordinating Service with Community Resources
- Early School-Leaving
- Suspension Rehabilitation

The Board of Education for the City of Hamilton
Special Services Panel

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GUIDELINES FOR EARLY IDENTIFICATION
OF NON ATTENDERS

These guidelines are defined for the use of Counsellors in junior schools. These steps are to be preventive, and, specifically, to deal with early identification of patterns of nonattendance in the primary grades.

Attendance Procedures

1. Review attendance checks made by the principal and teachers:
   - -on a daily basis
   - -teacher-to-secretary
   - -home calls
   - -identification of reasons of absence, notes, doctor certificates
   - -keeping an attendance calendar on chronic absenteeism

2. Absences beyond the normal range, eg., three days without medical verification should lead to a further check:
   - -teacher-to-principal consultations
   - -consultation with principal, school nurse, teacher
   - -Adjustment Counsellor consultations
   - -home visit with principal and/or teacher and the Counsellor, if parent cannot be reached.

   Early patterns and reasons should be documented by the teacher, preferably using an attendance calendar.

3. Students who accumulate patterns of absence of up to 20 days should be identified to the Adjustment Counsellor. Conferences with teacher, principal and parent should be initiated to discuss concerns of poor patterns of attendance, and possible alternatives and/or solutions.

   School personnel should stress:
   - -need for more consistant attendance and reasons why, eg., academic strengths, regularity and routine importance, expectations for the future, etc.
   - -further assessment if necessary, eg., Psychological Services
   - -any further input from the community and referral to outside resources discussed
   - -counselling student and family (open case by PAS) on a regular basis.

4. Cases should be opened on students and follow-up continued on a regular basis until there has been a general improvement that is evident by a better pattern of attendance.

   Since teachers are in the best position to affect changes in student behaviour and attitudes, it is imperative that we win the cooperation and confidence of each teacher in the schools within which we work. In order to achieve this particular goal it is suggested that the counsellor meet with the staff for short discussions and implementation of the early identification of non attenders.

Teacher Presentation

In 1976 the Ministry of Education Task Force was established to "identify strategies for improving regular attendance".

This attendance recording procedure task force has suggested that: "teachers be encouraged to become involved in actively promoting good attendance and should be given opportunities to acquire skills that will encourage and promote regular attendance by such means as inservice training".

The following are some suggestions that school personnel (teacher, principal, counsellor) can initiate, on a preventive basis, with a focus on habitual absenteeism.

The goals of this presentation are that you, as the teacher in this particular school will be able to:

i) become more aware of families and their needs when identifying early patterns of nonattendance,
ii) hopefully have more direct contact with the family and the student in consultation with the Adjustment Counsellor,
iii) also, direct contact wherever possible with community referral resources in order to receive feedback,
iv) where appropriate, an opportunity to visit the home with Adjustment Counsellor where nonattendance is a major concern.

What To Look For

It is important for all teachers to be aware of and to identify students who develop patterns in the area of nonattendance. These may be evident in the following ways:

i) repeated lateness,
ii) one day each week absences,
iii) faulty notes or questionable parental reasons for absences,
iv) nervousness or fear resulting in many absences,
v) overprotective parents,
vi) repeated somatic illnesses, especially stomach upsets, headaches, diarrhea, vomitting,
vii) Friday and/or Monday patterns of absences,
viii) students who frequently move and/or change schools,
ix) unusual family patterns and crisis, eg., illness, deaths, sudden moves, separations, divorces, overbearing grandparents, others?

What To Do

After identifying some of the above concerns, some of the following steps can occur directly with teacher and family:

-talk privately with the student to get a feeling of the concerns
-phone and discuss directly with parents your concern of any identified patterns of absenteeism or early signals
-document on an attendance calendar the absenteeism, notes, discussions with child and parent, indicate your concern to the principal, teacher and nurse.

-set up a conference with counsellor and principal to review any further steps in order to resolve specific attendance problems,
-set up, where possible, "perfect attendance recognition" steps, eg., stars for perfect week, etc. Any strategies here that would help improve and have a student come in on a regular basis.

Types of Non Attendance

1. Chronic Illnesses - the following can indicate concerns and irregular attendance, and these are identified through some forms of illnesses reoccurring on a regular basis:
   -constant colds, earaches, headaches, stomachaches, etc.,
   -notes from doctor or a variety of doctors used excessively in some cases,
   -medical assessments to be urged if not yet documented on chronic absenteeism through illness (done through parent-teacher, nurse, counsellor interviews).

   Possible Solutions
   -conference at school and/or home visit by teacher and counsellor,
   -family referred to clinic by counsellor for further physical assessment,
   -discussion with family general practitioner about physical concerns and absenteeism through Adjustment Counsellor,
   -further psychological assessment of child,
   -identification of any specific physical concerns, either through medical resources and/or teacher observations,
   -follow specific medical recommendations if these have been identified and concerns expressed by the Practitioner with specific students.

2. Overprotective Parent - the following may lead to the identification of parents and/or extended family that are overprotective:
   -child kept home often for no apparent reason,
   -concern of roughness on the playground,
   -continually walk the child to school beyond the kindergarten age on a regular basis and pick up the child,
   -discussing fears and anxieties of neighbourhood and playground activities re: injury and bullying,
   -constantly talking to the teacher and/or principal concerning fears and anxiety of safety.

   Possible Solutions
   -parent-teacher conference to discuss need for children's natural growth and group involvement outside the home and on the playground at the school,
   -direct to parents child's needs to mature socially under the school supervision,
   -assure parents of normal development, growth, supervision, etc.,
   -listen and accept concerns with an attempt to alleviate unnecessary anxieties,
   -conference teacher-parent-counsellor-principal-nurse,
   -psychological assessment and possible referral of family for further clinical assessment and/or counselling.

3. School Phobic - these occur usually where parents are expressing a wish to send the child to school, but the student refuses or hedges on a daily basis. Usually the student does well once he gets into the class and the difficulty usually arises in leaving the home or leaving the parent when he/she gets to the school.

These cases should be immediately discussed with principal. Referrals and involvement with Special Services will allow some of the following steps to occur:

-home visit and/or school conference,
-psychological assessment and consultation with parents,
-referral for treatment and further clinical assessment.

If dealt with in the early stages, many of these concerns can be overcome by making the room a warm and comfortable environment.

Chronic phobias may mean there are serious anxieties at home and it appears in separation from one of the parent figures. These may be expressed fears and anxieties concerning the school itself. Again, early guidance and intervention may be the best solution in the long run to reassure the child that school is a comfortable place to be at, just as is the home. These particular cases take careful consultation and collaboration to resolve.

SUGGESTED GUIDELINES

The following is perhaps what I would see as an appropriate way of instituting a standardized system of checks.

1. Each teacher (including subject teachers in Secondary Schools) keeps his own attendance check or record.

2. Immediate absenteeism that is unjustified or unreported should be followed through with a check by the teacher with the student or the home and if not possible via the office with the student and the home. An immediate check is important.

3. Attendance Clerks (or any team program developed) should attempt to make an immediate home call on any reported absentee. Where there is no phone a system of letters or home visits should be developed.

Daily Absenteeism

(a) Phone home - evening if necessary.

(b) Send letter and/or:

(c) Send Adjustment Counsellor on a Home Visit.

(d) There should be no more than a 3-4 day span of continued absenteeism without having made some home contact.

(e) Careful records kept of absenteeism as well as any calls or letters sent to the home. These are to be documented very carefully.

(f) Feedback to the teachers as to the steps the school is taking or to any responses received for absenteeism.

(g) All absences confirmed by notes or doctors' certificates.

(h) Habitual absence (patterns of absenteeism) identified as quickly as possible and office to deal with the student:
   (i) Counsel the student.
   (ii) Conference with parents.
   (iii) Refer to Adjustment Services.
   (iv) Suspension.

Period Skipping

(a) Each subject teacher checks his/her own class.

(b) First period skipping, the teacher should counsel the student.

(c) Second period skipping, a phone to the home to discuss with parents by the teacher.

(d) Third period skipping, to be dealt with at the office.

(e) Office in dealing with continually period skipping:
   (i) Counsel the student.
   (ii) Conference with parents.
   (iii) Refer to Adjustment Services.
   (iv) Suspension.

Early Detection of Non-Attendance
Primary-Junior

CATEGORY OF NON-ATTENDERS	COMMON CHARACTERISTICS	POSSIBLE STEPS TOWARD RESOLUTION OF PROBLEM
CHRONIC ILLNESS	- usually variety of physical complaints - some physician involvement & prescriptions to display	- Co'r or PHN contact family physician - Establish a plan which gets child to school but allays parental anxiety, e.g., child comes to school unless running a temperature - is able to go to nurse's room if necessary.
OVERLY PROTECTIVE PARENT	- invariably notes, phone calls come from parent explaining the illness - usually tied to physical complaints - often complaints of child being beaten up on route to school - parents bring child to school	- Plan to break child's dependance on parents by promoting more involvement with peers. - Recommendation for organized group interaction, e.g., cubs, sports activities, etc. - Plan must involve attempts to reduce parental anxiety, e.g., weekly reporting.
SCHOOL PHOBIA	- beyond poor attendance to school refusal - illness when at school-health room occupant - usually quiet, withdrawn - often bright	- Help child & parent face situation - must get child to school - parent, principal, Co'r bring child. - Counsel child. - Desensitizing perhaps through partial attendance, but must attend part of each half day.
TRUANT	- absences without notes or with questionable notes possibly of forging signatures - not necessary many absences - usually done in concert with other students or siblings - danger of community offences	- Direct contact with parents. - Readmit with parent(s) accompanying child to school. - Devise a plan for contacting home immediately if child is absent unless parent contacts school. - Child can be required to do "make up" time.
CHILD-IN-CONTROL	- Parents often excusing the child for one reason or another - Typical temper tantrum child - Appear over-indulged - candy for recess etc. - Often in control by using emotional blackmail - Often parents feel inferior & powerless	- Helping parent to see the position of power the child has gained. - Encouraging parent to call the child's bluff. - Setting firm guidelines at home & school & administering these with consistency so child cannot play the home against the school.

(continued)

LONG WEEK-ENDERS	- typical absences on Friday, Monday and days following P.D. days - family often out-of-town or returning late on Sunday - usually the parent(s) are delinquent rather than the child	- Show attendance calendar to parents thus graphically making connections. - No matter how able the student, over-emphasize if necessary the connection between attendance and progress. - Never let such absences go by without making your point.
LONELY PARENT	- frequent, intermittent absences - usually single parent(s), recent separation - illness often given as reason for absence - sibling absence usually does not coincide	- If possible, involve PHN to check out absences reportedly from illness but particularly to get into the home to explore parent's needs and devise a plan for her (him). - Involve parent in school volunteer programme.
EXPLOITED CHILD	- absent usually for babysitting younger siblings, for running errands, etc. - usually no pattern to absences unless it coincides with a parent's work schedule	- Often confrontation by principal, Co'r etc. is necessary. - A plan for alternative babysitting is often a practical solution. - Counselling child and parent about necessity for good attendance is vital.

SCHOOL ATTENDANCE

Hypothetical Attendance Calendar

M	T	W	T	F
1	2	3	4	5
8	9	10	11	12
15	16	17	18	19
22	23	24	25	26
29	30	31		

What To Look For

What The Teacher Can Do

What The Parent Can Do

What The School Can Do (Principal-Guidance-Public Health Nurse-Student Services)

What The Community Can Do

ATTENDANCE CALENDAR

1979 - 1980

NAME _____ SCHOOL _____

ADDRESS _____ GRADE _____ PROGRAM/LEVEL _____

BIRTHDATE _____ CLASS _____ TEACHER _____

1979

SEPTEMBER

Pres. ____
Abs. ____
Total 19

~~3~~	4	5	6	7
10	11	12	13	14
17	18	19	20	21
24	25	26	27	28

OCTOBER

Pres. ____
Abs. ____
Total 22

1	2	3	4	5
~~8~~	9	10	11	12
15	16	17	18	19
22	23	24	25	26
29	30	31		

NOVEMBER

Pres. ____
Abs. ____
Total 22

			1	2
5	6	7	8	9
12	13	14	15	16
19	20	21	22	23
26	27	28	29	30

DECEMBER

Pres. ____
Abs. ____
Total 15

3	4	5	6	7
10	11	12	13	14
17	18	19	20	21
~~24~~	~~25~~	~~26~~	~~27~~	~~28~~
~~31~~				

1980

JANUARY

Pres. ____
Abs. ____
Total 21

	~~1~~	~~2~~	3	4
7	8	9	10	11
14	15	16	17	18
21	22	23	24	25
28	29	30	31	

FEBRUARY

Pres. ____
Abs. ____
Total 21

				1
4	5	6	7	8
11	12	13	14	15
18	19	20	21	22
25	26	27	28	29

MARCH

Pres. ____
Abs. ____
Total 16

3	4	5	6	7
10	11	12	13	14
~~17~~	~~18~~	~~19~~	~~20~~	~~21~~
24	25	26	27	~~28~~
31				

APRIL

Pres. ____
Abs. ____
Total 20

	1	2	3	~~4~~
~~7~~	8	9	10	11
14	15	16	17	18
21	22	23	24	25
28	29	30		

MAY

Pres. ____
Abs. ____
Total 21

				1
5	6	7	8	9
12	13	14	15	16
~~19~~	20	21	22	23
26	27	28	29	30

JUNE

Pres. ____
Abs. ____
Total 20

2	3	4	5	6
9	10	11	12	13
16	17	18	19	20
23	24	25	26	27

Date _____ Date Checked _____

I certify that the above document presents a true and accurate statement of attendance of the above-named pupil in this school.

Witness _____ Principal's Signature _____